



Community Relations Commission

~ Minutes ~

Thursday, May 14, 2020

City Hall, Second Floor
Rockford, IL 61104

<http://www.rockfordil.gov/>

I. CALL TO ORDER

Legal Director Nick Meyer called the meeting to order at 5:36 p.m. The meeting was convened virtually via Webex video conference.

A. Roll Call

Commissioner Name	Status
Eric Brown	Present
Todd Burton	Present
Jurea Crudup	Absent
Victoria De La Rosa	Present
Erin Hannigan	Present
Nikki Lynch	Present – Joined Meeting 5:46pm
William Martin	Present
Anqunette Parham	Present
Ricardo Montoya Picazo	Present
Charles Prorok	Present – Joined Meeting 5:41pm
Jay Ware	Present

B. Acceptance of Proceedings for the Community Relations Commission meetings held on January 9, 2020 and February 13, 2020.

Chair Burton made MOTION to Accept the Journal of Proceedings for the January 9, 2020 Meeting, Commissioner Martin MOVED, Commissioner De La Rosa SECONDED the MOTION. CARRIED 8-o.

Chair Burton made MOTION to Accept the Journal of Proceedings for the February 13, 2020 meeting. Commissioner Martin MOVED, Commissioner Ware SECONDED the MOTION. CARRIED 8-o.

II. PUBLIC SPEAKERS

1. No public speakers attended the meeting.

III. INFORMATION ONLY

A. COVID-19 update from City Staff

Legal Director Nicholas Meyer provided an update regarding the City's COVID response, which included an update about past and future action. Director Meyer stated that this has been a dynamic situation with the initial executive order and the two extensions. He further stated that the Legal Department has handled many of the complaints, concerns, and inquiries and that this has occupied a lot of the department's time of late.



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Small Businesses

For small businesses, particularly in the hospitality industry at the restaurants, hotels, and bars, the City has extended the collection of metro taxes and the City's portion of the sales tax to July. These may be extended again.

Liquor and Tobacco

The City has extended liquor and tobacco license renewals and payments to the end of July—businesses are being allowed to continue operating under license extension.

Water Payments

The City has paused any water shutoffs due to delinquent accounts. The City is also waiving late payment fees. We are also waiving any fees associated with paying over the phone or paying by credit card.

Community Development

The Community Development Department staff has been assisting business owners with their applications for the small business loans and CDC loans. The City's partners have also put together a 2 million dollar emergency loan fund for small business, and there is a microenterprise emergency loan program starting. This will be a 1.3-million-dollar fund eligible for small businesses with lower income and a small number of employees.

Human Services Department

The Human Services Department has been active with rental/mortgage assistance applications. The department also has vouchers for people who need immediate housing assistance, helping them find temporary housing in a hotel or at another site. Director Meyer encouraged Commissioners to reach out to former Commissioner Anquetette Parham, who now heads the department, with questions or to connect people who may need housing assistance.

Director Meyer expressed his gratitude to Commissioners for their amazing job stepping into a crisis during this time.

Food Distribution Center

Eight food distribution centers have been set up around the city. The Human Services Department can also assist families with providing food through the City of Rockford Head Start Program.

Domestic Violence

There has been an approximately 50% increase in domestic violence-related calls during this health crisis. City staff have done our best to provide assistance and connection to services. The Family Peace Center is on track to open this summer—City Council has recently approved the lease of City-owned space to the non-profit. At the Center, there will be a number of co-partners such as Rockford Sexual Assault Counseling, Rockford Police Department, Prairie State Legal Services and others.

Rockford Region Rebounding



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The Mayor has put a group together called the “Rockford Region Rebounding” to brainstorm on how our City can best transition to the new normal in light of the health crisis. Approximately 140 people representing at least 10 industries serve on various subgroups as part of this effort.

Director Meyer concluded by stating that the Illinois Governor has rolled out a five-phase plan for re-opening. While there has been a push from local businesses, especially hospitality businesses, to get up and running as soon as possible, many of the businesses have state licenses. Even if we allow them to open sooner locally, those businesses run the risk of losing those state licenses if they open sooner. They also run the risk that insurance carriers may not cover them if open earlier than the state has allowed.

Chair Burton thanked City staff for their hard work in the midst of the health crisis, and commented that it is some of the best work he has seen between the City and County in his years working with managing crises. Commissioner Brown thank the City and Winnebago Health Department for making COVID updates issued by them as accessible as possible.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Approval of Meeting Schedule for 2020

Commissioner Martin MOVED and Commissioner Montoya Picazo SECONDED the MOTION to approve the Commission Meeting Schedule for 2020. CARRIED 10-0

B. Discussion of how CRC can assist in reopening

The Commission collectively discussed how they might assist the community in reopening. Chair Todd Burton stated that the Commission’s charter is pretty broad and welcomed input from Commissioners.

Commissioner Brown stated that he believed each Commissioner’s responsibility is to share information with the communities they are part of. He asked staff to identify any support or assistance needed. Legal Director Nicholas Meyer suggested for all Commissioners to sign up to receive City updates via email if they have not already, and to let City staff know if there are communities or people who are not being reached with important information. Also, he asked Commissioners to check the City’s website regularly about available assistance to community members and businesses.

Commissioner De La Rosa stated the Commission has to make sure that information is available to every section of the community in the various languages that are spoken.

Commissioner Hannigan agreed with Commissioner De La Rosa regarding offering resources in all languages. She noted that there is more limited contact with clients/people so getting information out in other way is important during this time.

Commissioner Lynch said the Commission should think about how best to get information out through the networks each person has.



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Commissioner Montoya Picazo suggested that a message in every language would be beneficial. He stated he would like the Commission to connect more with the community and thinks a social media account, possibly a Facebook page under Community Relations Commission, could be a way to do that. This would allow the Commission to receive comments from the public about what is on their mind and enable everyone to pass on the information received from to the City.

Commissioner Prorok stated communication is the biggest thing at this point in time.

Commissioner Ware suggested that we create safe places for people to work in and that nursing homes should be testing everyone in their facility. He noted that River Bluff Nursing Home has made all employees get tested. Commissioner Ware also stated his concerns on where people can go to isolate if they have been exposed to someone who has tested positive and cannot return home because they will expose their families to the virus.

Director Meyer commented that the number one complaint that the City is receiving is from employees who are concerned that their work place is not taking safety measures to protect them. He shared that City Code Enforcement staff and County Health Department staff are going out to review the complaints that the City is receiving. Director Meyer noted that he would try to compile a list of all the things employers should be providing to their employees, and information for the community on where and how they can put in a complaint for the employer to be investigated. Employees don't know what they can and cannot do regarding complaints, and some businesses simply don't know the rules.

Commissioner De La Rosa stated she had a question regarding National Guard and their role at testing sites. She asked whether they require a form/questionnaire to be filled out to get tested and commented that if National Guard is present in uniform and requiring people to provide a State ID, it's discouraging certain members of the community to be tested. Commissioner De La Rosa stated she believes it can interfere with undocumented citizens in our community.

Legal Director Nicholas Meyer stated that Todd Marshall from the County Health Department and Dr. Martell can give the group an update at the next meeting if the Commission would like.

Chair Burton asked about whether the City had heard of any fair housing issues coming up during the crisis. Director Meyer commented that the City has heard of instances where landlords have not been flexible and have started evictions or even tripled rent. He commented that landlords may in turn be having their own difficulties paying mortgages or taxes on the properties they own. Chair Burton suggested the topic of fair housing may be one that the Commission keeps its eye on and may want to invite a speaker or speakers related to this topic to future meetings (i.e. legal aid or even landlords).

Commissioner Martin asked what due diligence employers have to employees if employees get sick while working—can employees sue their employer? Director Meyer



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encouraged anyone with issues or concerns about employers following social distancing requirements to contact himself, the Winnebago County Health Department, or the Illinois Department of Labor. He stated that right now, it look like if an employee is deemed an essential worker, they could be eligible for workers compensation if exposed while on the job.

V. COMMISSIONERS REPORTS

Commissioner Martin stated that Providence Baptist Church at 2209 Clifton would be open to being available as a site for food distribution if it would be helpful.

No other Commissioners had reports.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Ware made a MOTION to ADJOURN. Commissioner Prorok SECONDED the MOTION. CARRIED 10-0. The meeting adjourned at 6:39 p.m.